

HIGH POVERTY AS A FORM OF LIFE: THE PHENOMENON OF FRANCISCAN SPIRITUALITY IN THE CONTEXT OF PHILOSOPHICAL COMPREHENSION

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In 1889 in the article "Theosophical questions" H.P. Blavatsky wrote: "If there are no "poor" in the world, then "civilization" won't lose its "attractive charm", but, on the contrary, will develop to such a high cultural level, which we now cannot even imagine remotely. Convinced of the transient nature of material happiness, a desire for eternal bliss, accessible to every person, is born". Unfortunately, but over a hundred years, we do not see the disappearance of poverty or the decrease in the number of the poor. Therefore, it seems to be necessary to try to change the first line of this statement, namely "If there are no "rich" in the world...". Although such a formulation is provocative and has a "dirty" use experience, it does not change the basic meaning, but determines another way to achieve a "high cultural level." According to Mahatma Gandhi: "Civilization in the true sense of the word is not in the multiplication of needs, but in a free and well thought out limitation of their desires".

In the context of the philosophical dialogue of the path, we note that the modern leader of the Catholic Church, being named Francis in honor of St. Francis of Assisi, the patron of the poor, proposes to change the vector of development of mankind, insisting: "We have to do less and live modestly. We should all be thinking: can we become a little poorer? It is a duty of each of us – not having so many things, and to become a little poorer".

One of the most radical examples of this form of life is the concept of "the highest poverty" (*altissima paupertas*) of the medieval movement of Franciscans, to which we shall address to show that besides the established modern political and economic system, there is another direction of development of Western culture, which, in our opinion, is still waiting for its incarnation. The Franciscan experience of poverty (*usus pauper*) can help us understand why and how exactly one who lives a life according to

the standards of the poor can be able to reduce the poverty that they share: 1) he or she know their real needs; 2) value people and problems in a real manner, not functionally; 3) understand the importance of the gift and exchange without waiting for a well-calculated return; 4) able to see all people and all issues in the prospect of completeness and prosperity.

As is known, the founder of the monastic Order of the Franciscans was Saint Francis of Assisi (app. 1181-1226). He preached love for people and for other creations of God, called for repentance and life in forgiveness, opposed the cruelty of his time, humility and obedience. St. Francis sought to avoid the evil of his time, denying, first of all, material wealth, which he regarded as the source and root of all the infirmities of a sinful person and an open wound of spiritual religion. So, in the Rule of St. Francis it is said: "The Lord commands in the gospel: "Take heed, beware of all malice and covetousness (Luke 12:15) ... Therefore, every brother, no matter where he was and wherever he goes, let him not to take or accept or order to take no money ... so that through such a smallness, not to lose the kingdom of heaven" ("Regula non bullata", cap. VIII).

The importance of this document is extraordinary. In essence, it's not about avoiding moral evils (anger, greed, etc.), but in order to avoid the new order (the money) that produces them. The Franciscans, like the "fratres minores", must live in absolute dependence: by giving up their human guarantees and assurances, they fully trust in the goodness of God and others. Brothers in relation to men and women, sons towards God – only in such a way they will be able to reach the peak of the highest poverty. This is a complete, holistic way of life that Francis tries to show that the problem does not begin and ends with greed, ambition, violence or subordination to each other, but the system that creates them and on which they depend. Life without ownership does not mean that you have nothing to give, but that you have nothing to sell.

It is known that the movement of Franciscans, having just appeared (1208), gained a significant number of supporters and popular recognition. The laymen criticized the commitment of the higher clergy and monasteries to demonstrate magnificence and luxury. The appeal to return to the poverty, simplicity and pure spirituality of the early Church was widely supported by the people. The purpose of the Franciscan monks was to preach the gospel way of life in society, that is, life in peace, fraternity, love and harmony. The rule of Francis of Assisi, approved by the pope Honorius III (1223), presents the theme of brotherly love in an inextricable connection with the theme of extreme poverty. Francis joins his brothers to

the highest poverty (*altissima paupertas*), clearly pointing out the fraternity as the only space in which the abolition of property and the exclusion of all types of domination (*dominium*) can be made without compromising the integrity of both an individual legal entity and a group. In this sense, the Franciscan "highest poverty" is not a "single" ascetic practice for salvation (from the Greek, *μοναχός* – "single") as it was in monastic tradition. Now, this practice is an integral part of the "apostolic" or "holy" life, which is practiced in the joint perfect joy. Therefore, the Franciscan Brotherhood is a space of real ties and relationships. The fundamental principle governing these relationships is the principle of reciprocity: not functional but interpersonal relationships are important. And this is one of the key points to understand why St. Francis wanted a brotherhood, not a "community". The Franciscan Rule does not have any parents, no abbots, no rectors, nor any institutions or spiritual institutions that create, define or maintain a vertical or pyramidal structure.

In the structure of the brotherhood, which is irreversibly horizontal, every brother (as the monks call themselves in real life) seeks to ensure that all power remains exclusively in the hands of God. The General Secretary of the Order," Francis repeated, "is the Holy Spirit. But not in a hierarchical sense. St. Francis often uses the expression "to have the Spirit of the Lord" (*habere Spiritum Domini*), which is the definition of the supernatural spiritual state of special intimacy, unity with God. "Most (brothers) should want to have the Spirit of the Lord and His holy action in himself" ("*Regula bullata*", cap. X). This means that for the Franciscan Rules the way of life is one that does not simply obey the Rule, but follows the footsteps of poverty of Jesus, that is, it appears to be the effect of the spirit of God. We note that the evangelical poverty of radical Franciscan movements was understood not as a new exegesis of sacred text, but its pure and simple identification with life, as if they did not want to read and interpret the Gospel, but only to live. But the ultimate meaning is that, by refusing to constituent elements of the established order (social, political, legal, economic, etc.), the Franciscan form of life achieves a real opportunity not to reproduce this order. If desired, such a change or transformation of the practice of life actually leads to another consciousness and another world.

In this context, the most valuable legacy of the Franciscan concept of "the highest poverty" is the understanding of life as being never given as property, but only as a divine gift, from which the criticism of modern functional, economic and governmental ontology, which continues under

various masks, determine the fate of the human species. The direction of the development of Western culture, proposed by Franciscans, in our opinion, is still waiting for its embodiment. According to the modern Italian philosopher G. Agamben, "the use of what is meant by the theory developed by the theologians of the Franciscan Order makes "the highest poverty" a form of life that begins exactly where all forms of life in the West end".

In conclusion, I would like to note that the principles of Franciscan spirituality are similar to the universal Theosophical truths that change the attitude of man to life as soon as it begins to apply it. In general, they can be expressed as follows: "Man is an immortal soul, which grows to the ideal of perfection, cooperating with the Divine Plan, first of all learning to help their fellow human being".